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Viewing cable 07SANSALVADOR765, EARLY SPECULATION OVER 2009 FMLN PRESIDENTIAL

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#07SANSALVADOR765.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07SANSALVADOR765	2007-04-23 17:13	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201106/notas/4412/>

VZCZCXYZ0021
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #0765/01 1131713
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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5981
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000765

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2017
TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: EARLY SPECULATION OVER 2009 FMLN PRESIDENTIAL
TICKET.

REF: A. 2006 SAN SALVADOR 2008

[1](#)B. 2006 SAN SALVADOR 2508

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY and Comment: Notwithstanding ongoing media speculation regarding possible FMLN presidential candidates for the 2009 elections, moderate FMLN Legislative Assembly Deputy Hugo Martinez recently outlined to poloff that his party has settled on television commentator Mauricio Funes as their 2009 presidential candidate, with the FMLN's Legislative Assembly delegation chief Salvador Sanchez Ceren filling the vice presidential slot. If Martinez's assertion is true, the choice appears to be a carefully-calculated move to broaden the party's appeal beyond its loyal activist base, which has so far been unsuccessful in efforts to achieve national office. In our view, it is unlikely that the FMLN leadership has picked its presidential candidate this early. However, a battle still looms ahead between those who want to select a "kinder, gentler face" and the Communist Party hardliners who favor one of their own. END SUMMARY and Comment.

12. (C) All three of the FMLN's presidential candidates in postwar presidential elections have been former guerrilla combatants from the five political-military groups that formed the FMLN in 1980, and the FMLN has lost every such election by margins of 22 to 24 percent. During 2006, debate began to emerge within the party's leadership regarding the advisability of choosing a fresh face from outside the ranks of party activists for 2009, in hopes of broadening the ticket's appeal among the electorate beyond its traditional constituency. Recent media reports have highlighted speculation regarding possible FMLN candidates. Popular FMLN Santa Tecla Mayor and former National Mayors Association (COMURES) President Oscar Ortiz has been conspicuously absent from most such lists. Ortiz, who was narrowly edged out by the late Schafik Handal in his bid to be the party's 2004 presidential candidate, angered the party's hardliner leadership in mid-2006 by unilaterally voicing his interest in another possible presidential bid. FMLN San Salvador Mayor Dr. Violeta Menjivar, while still publicly mentioned among possible 2009 presidential candidates, has lost ground politically since inheriting the capital's near-insoluble problems of crime, poverty, overpopulation, and crumbling infrastructure. Soyapango Mayor Carlos "El Diablito" Ruiz, a longtime Communist Party stalwart, has shown interest in running, but his trademark military garb emblazoned with red stars and the Cuban flag savors too much of the past for him to have serious prospects as a national candidate. Party Chairman Medardo Gonzalez (a.k.a. "Comandante Milton Mendez") appears to have little interest or support in running.

13. (C) Mauricio Funes began his career in broadcast journalism during the nation's civil war in 1986, with a morning talk show on Channel 12 that served primarily as a forum for left-of-center FMLN sympathizers (reftel B). Funes was fired without notice in 2005 by Channel 12's Mexican parent company, which cited low ratings for his show. Although many leftists charged that Funes's firing had been politically-motivated, other political observers and members of the media responded that Funes had misused the show to promote his own political agenda, and that he also had a widespread reputation of being overbearing and difficult to work with. Funes has since reestablished himself with a show on the Megavision network's Channel 21, and he also serves as an occasional correspondent for the Spanish-language version of CNN. In 2003 Funes angled for an offer to become the FMLN's 2004 presidential candidate, but was reportedly rebuffed with the admonishment that he should first join the party, and that in any event the VP spot would be the very best that might be possible under any circumstances. (Note: Prior to the FMLN's 2003 selection of Handal as its candidate, internal ARENA party polls showed that Funes might beat an ARENA candidate by approximately 10 percent. End note.) The once-divorced Funes recently married the Brazilian Embassy's Cultural Affairs Officer Wanda Pignato, whose reportedly close ties to higher political circles in Brazil has led to speculation and rumors that Funes might be

"Lula's candidate".

¶4. (C) Ceren, a Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) guerrilla leader who fought under the nom de guerre "Comandante Leonel Gonzalez", will likely wield the real power should the FMLN prevail in 2009. Former FMLN Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) Magistrate Julio Hernandez, now National Coordinator of the new Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), has long asserted to poloff that with all moderate voices within the FMLN now expelled or otherwise silenced, the party might

explore running a moderate-sounding figurehead for president in 2009, with a reliable member of the old guard in the number-two slot to enforce discipline to the hardliners' orthodox creed. (See reftel C.) The FMLN's veteran caudillo and former Party Chairman Ceren is the perfect candidate to fulfill such a role.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: After years of putting forward lackluster candidates who remind most voters of the nation's painful and bloody past, the FMLN may finally have learned its lesson. With a more attractive candidate, likely financial backing from Venezuela's Chavez (reftel A), and President Saca struggling to address the nation's staggering violent crime, the FMLN has greater expectations than ever before for 2009. Still, nearly two years remain before the elections, and any show of ideological independence or other misstep by Funes between now and then could bring down the wrath of hardliners, and lead to the political exile already well-populated by those who have run afoul of the FMLN's orthodox faithful.
Glazer

=====CABLE ENDS=====